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**LARGE MARIJUANA CULTIVATION SITES UNCOVERED IN
SHASTA COUNTY LEAD TO FEDERAL INDICTMENTS**

SACRAMENTO -- United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott and Shasta County Sheriff Jim Pope announced today that ROBERTO CORONA, 37, JUANA VARGAS, 22, HUMBERTO MARMOLEJO, 29, GRISELDA ALEJO, 22, ADRIAN VENEGAS-AVALOS, 28, and SAUL CORONA, 19, were indicted today by a federal grand jury in connection with a conspiracy to cultivate marijuana plants in Shasta County, California.

The case was investigated by the North State Initiative - California Multi-Jurisdictional Methamphetamine Enforcement Team (CALMET), California Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement (BNE), and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

According to federal court documents and information revealed during court proceedings, on September 26, 2005 state and federal agents concluded a six-month investigation into the cultivation and distribution of marijuana by ROBERTO CORONA, and his associates, operating out of a residence located at 19336 Le Claire Lane, Redding, California, which law enforcement believed was utilized as a place to house illegal immigrants who worked in the marijuana gardens, and to store processed marijuana and the growing equipment utilized in the growing of marijuana plants.

Pursuant to the execution of a state search warrant at the Le Claire address, agents arrested ROBERTO CORONA, JUANA VARGAS, HUMBERTO MARMOLEJO, GRISELDA ALEJO, ADRIAN VENEGAS-AVALOS, and SAUL CORONA, all believed to reside in Redding, California.

While searching the Le Claire address, agents seized eight trimming scissors utilized for trimming marijuana plants (all of the trimmers had green residue and smelled like marijuana), eight two-way handheld radios, two Ohaus scales, 36 used burlap bags which smelled like marijuana, a four-person dome tent, numerous irrigation supplies, including white PVC piping painted green, two rolls of black irrigation pipe, duffle bags containing clothing, and two large buckets containing marijuana and handguns. Located and photographed, but not seized, was a portable battery charger utilized for charging handheld two-way radios and cellular telephones.

Four days after the execution of the state search warrant, agents located the marijuana

grow sites where agents had previously surveilled individuals deployed from the Le Claire address to tend to the marijuana gardens. Located at the Iron Mountain Road area was a recently- harvested, large-scale marijuana garden complex yielding approximately 2,000 marijuana plants, which had been recently harvested. This marijuana garden site was located at the end of a heavily-used human trail approximately 50 yards from where agents observed MARMOLEJO and CORONA transport numerous workers who tended this garden. In a campsite located inside the garden complex was a handheld battery charger identical to the one located during the search at the Le Claire address.

Agents found a second marijuana grow site near Albers Forest Road where MARMOLEJO, CORONA, and AVALOS had been seen on numerous surveillances. Agents located a heavily-used human trail leading to a large marijuana garden complex yielding approximately 8,089 growing marijuana plants ranging from five to seven feet tall. Also found at this garden site was another battery charger like the one seized at the Iron Mountain grow site.

According to court documents, the six defendants have been charged with conspiracy to manufacture over 1,000 marijuana plants. This offense carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison to a maximum penalty of life, and a maximum fine of \$4,000,000. The defendants are also charged with manufacturing at least 1,000 marijuana plants which carries the same penalties.

The charges are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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